

The Bible as a Social Organizational Tool in African Urban Pentecostalism

The Case of Christ Is the Answer Ministries, Valley Road

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Abstract

African urban Pentecostalism has attracted growing scholarly attention for its complex social and cultural dynamics. A key factor in its development is the strong resonance between African cultural values—especially the centrality of family—and Old Testament social structures. This article examines how the Bible functions as a tool of social organization within African urban Pentecostalism, shaping communal life amid the disruptions of urbanization, industrialization, and capitalism. Focusing on Christ is the Answer Ministries (CITAM), Valley Road, and using grounded theory to analyze qualitative data, the study argues that African urban Pentecostalism emerges from a tension between the traditional extended family and the increasingly dominant nuclear family. The findings show that many urban Africans turn to CITAM to navigate these pressures, drawing on biblical interpretation to build alternative or supplementary social networks that foster cohesion and well-being. The article demonstrates that the Bible is not merely a spiritual authority but a vital cultural resource that enables African Pentecostals to reconstruct supportive social structures in an otherwise fragmented urban environment.

Keywords

Capitalism; industrialization; urbanization; social organizational tool

Introduction

The Kenyan history of the late 1980s and 1990s was marked by disillusionment, anger, bitterness, pain, frustration, and sorrow (Murunga 1999). Most Kenyans understood that they needed change, but they never knew how to realize. Chaos, violence, and trepidation characterized life in Kenyan urban centres. To capture this pain, confusion, and sorrow, a statue was erected on one of the main streets in Nairobi. At the base of this statue was written, ‘The body of this man is in the city, but his soul is in the village.’ Situated about four kilometres from the statue is Christ is the Answer Ministries (CITAM), Valley Road, a Pentecostal megachurch that began as a Bible study group for expatriates. (N.N. 2004, 115).

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CITAM Valley Road is part of approximately 40 congregations under the name CITAM. CITAM serves a population of over 60,000 across the country, with some congregations located outside of Kenya.

During one of the Sunday worship services, the preacher and his wife preached and dramatized the story of King David and Bathsheba using the theme of ‘Mental Health in the Family’ (CITAM Valley Road 2022). The preacher portrayed King David’s part while his wife played Bathsheba. Towards the end of the sermon, the preacher said, ‘I have to do this,’ and added, ‘I had asked the senior pastor about it, and he agreed.’ The preacher then put the microphone down. He removed his jacket and tie, unbuttoned his shirt, and took it off. The congregation was startled by the vest the preacher wore; it had notable holes. Holding the end of his torn vest, the preacher said, ‘This represents the life and reality for the majority of men: very well-dressed, but beneath the polished suit and tie lies a life that has been hurt, wounded, bleeding, and in need of healing.

The preacher then called on men who identified with the sermon and the condition of his vest to come forward for prayer, emotional healing, and restoration. The response from the men was overwhelming as one man walked to the front, followed by another and another, until almost all the men in the congregation gathered there. Noting the number of men who identified with the sermon and the torn vest, the women were deeply moved. The preacher invited the senior pastor to pray for the men. The senior pastor requested that the seated women pray for the men facing the altar, even as he prayed for them. There was tension in the sanctuary. This tension was broken as women reached for their handkerchiefs, some to wipe away their tears and others to blow their noses. After the prayer, the men were invited to join the Consistent Bible Reading (CBR) programme and encouraged to take part in Small Christian Communities (Safari Groups) and the Men’s Fellowship for spiritual growth.

For three years, I immersed myself in the life of CITAM, conducting ethnographic research. Purposive sampling was employed to identify CITAM as a Pentecostal megachurch where English serves as the primary language of communication, located in urban centres. Throughout the research process, it became evident that Christian scripture—the Bible or God’s word—consistently informs every aspect of the church’s life. By making the Bible central to Christian practice and expression, an ongoing campaign has encouraged all CITAM members to participate in Consistent Bible Reading classes (CBR) each year. As a participant-observer, I joined Cohort 4, which initially had over a thousand members. The CBR classes typically take approximately eight months to complete, reading the entire Bible. Every year for six years, CITAM members, or Citamites (*sic*), as they affectionately call themselves, register in substantial numbers. Upon completion, they are awarded certificates and commissioned to be Consistent Bible Readers.

Through the research, I encountered a respondent and a member who noted that after Kenya gained sovereignty from British rule, the missionaries regretted committing three sins: the first was introducing Africans to Christianity, the second was teaching Africans how to read and write, and the third was taking Africans to fight alongside the Europeans in the First and Second World Wars. As a result of these experiences, Africans could readily perceive themselves as equal to the missionaries and Europeans and, consequently, demand equal treatment, if not better. At the heart of the Christian missionary enterprise are the revolutionary aspects of the Bible and Christianity at its best. The implication is that reading the Bible in community and exploring and applying its message together is the most effective way to engage with Scripture. People don’t simply need to read the Bible; they need to engage with it (Eddie 2013).

This article, therefore, critically examines the significance of engaging with the Bible in the lives of CITAM leadership and congregants. The research highlights that since the

founding of CITAM Valley Road as a Bible study group in the early 1950s, the Bible has been at the heart of the church, aiming to transform individuals by renewing their minds through its teachings. In many sermons, the preacher would pray: ‘Father God, make this your written word and the spoken word your living word that will accomplish what you have purposed to achieve’ (CITAM Church Online 2020).

Contextual Analysis

CITAM, located on Valley Road, began in the early 1950s as an afternoon Bible study group comprising missionaries and expatriates from various mission agencies and countries. (N.N. 2004, 115). It subsequently evolved into a denomination that concentrated on urban areas and exclusively targeted English speakers, a development of historical significance (Mugambi 2009, 21). The group was first known as the Pentecostal Evangelistic Centre. At the time of its formation, Kenya was engulfed in the Mau Mau uprising, which demanded independence from the British Government. The 1950s were challenging times for spreading the gospel in Nairobi because nationalism fervour was high (Mugambi 2009, 22). Despite the security threats, the missionaries envisioned a Pentecostal church in Nairobi that would cater to English-speaking believers. Notably, the literature on CITAM Valley Road and other CITAM congregations is scarce despite the significant growth the church has experienced. The primary language of the church is English, and it focuses its activities mainly on urban centres. This article highlights the significance of the Bible in the establishment and expansion of CITAM congregations across urban areas in Kenya and beyond.

Mugambi (2020), writing about Pentecostalism in Africa, employs a devotional lens to narrate how the spirit of revitalization is evident in urban Pentecostalism. The current study adopts a social science approach, examining how the church, as a social institution, responds to the needs of the social context in which it exists. Urban areas can be places of chaos and violence. Without law and order, life can be short and brutish (Oruka 2007, 31). However, humans are social beings, and coming together will always involve some social organizing for survival and well-being. Social organization is the intricate web of relationships connecting individuals and social groups. These relationships shape how people interact, collaborate, and function within various contexts. Generally, the survival instinct is inherent in every human being, so children cry immediately after birth. Humans learn to survive, thrive, and be productive over time. Both survival instincts and productivity instincts work well in social organizations. Therefore, humans founded laws to live together in a civil state (Oruka 2007, 31). This study highlights how the Christian scriptures have been utilized to temper natural, selfish human instincts, enabling individuals to make ethical judgments and foster peaceful coexistence. At the heart of Christianity lies the teaching of restoration and redemption for authentic life, which John 10:10 calls ‘abundant life’. The study adopts a sociological perspective to unpack the role of CITAM in fostering social structures that promote well-being and harmony in conflict-ridden urban contexts in Kenya.

CITAM, as a social organization, uses the Christian Education Department (CED), a department for intentional discipleship (Christ is The Answer Ministries (CITAM) Valley Road, n.d., 1). Some aspects or characteristics, such as the group’s gender makeup, significantly influence the dynamics of the CED groups. For instance, there are men’s fellowships and women’s fellowships. Each group has its day for meetings and a specific calendar of events. Each CED group views the Bible and the Christian life from a contextual perspective (CITAM 2022b, 16). Another characteristic that stands out is spatial cohesion, which is how individuals come together in physical space and time.¹ Using this aspect,

¹ Throughout the research period the researcher was a participant observer in a Safari Group and was a regular member of the Men’s Fellowship that meets on the third Friday of the month in the evening.

CITAM Valley Road has required and encouraged each member to join a neighbourhood church (Safari Group) as a member (CITAM 2022b, 40). The CED prepares Bible study materials for the Safari Groups, which usually align with the church's annual themes.

CITAM Valley Road's vision of 'a community of believers impacting the world with the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ through the transforming power of the Holy Spirit' appreciates the significance of the Gospel, or the Bible, in the hands of the church leadership and the congregation. New and continuing members are taken through the Leadership Advancement Pathway (LAP) annually to align with the church's vision and mission (CITAM Valley Road n.d.). At the heart of the training, the leaders are taught and trained to handle the Bible and present the gospel message to the members of the groups they lead. The CED coordinates over thirty ministry groups and teams. In the vision statement, the word 'community' stands out as a key element. CITAM Valley Road leadership and members strive to foster a sense of closeness among themselves to help build a strong sense of identity and community. The current article demonstrates how engaging the Bible plays a central role in shaping this sense of identity and community.

The Bible is a vital source for Christian theology and practice and is the primary source that determines how much credibility to assign to other sources (Enyinnaya n.d., 37). The effort to discern the word of God is notable at CITAM. An observer will note the primacy of the scriptures, even when it comes to the public prayers offered by leaders in various meetings. There is an understanding that the word of God that needs to be discerned has already been revealed in the Scriptures, reaching its zenith in the Christ event (Enyinnaya n.d., 38). It is the task of the believer to reflect upon and apply the word of God to one's life. Furthermore, one can interpret the Scriptures in ways that foster faith in Christ and strengthen the church. The efforts at CITAM Valley Road to ensure the word of God is placed in the believer's hands are enviable. In this endeavour, God is the focus of the reflections and the believer's way of life. Believers are encouraged to watch their lives by devoting themselves to studying and meditating on God's word so that they may thrive in life (1 Timothy 4:14-16). True freedom and life come from knowing God, and it may be argued that Africa persists in its problems today because of the lack of this knowledge of God and the life he gives (Enyinnaya n.d., 39).

The need to place the Bible and study materials in the hands of a growing congregation demands an adequate supply of the materials needed for growth and maturity. When Johann Gutenberg developed a printing press, every major European city had one by the end of the 15th century (Thomas 1995, 378). The advent of the printing press had a profound influence on the 16th-century Reformation. This revolutionary technology facilitated the dissemination of ideas, empowered individuals, and challenged established authority, ultimately reshaping Europe's religious landscape. In the 21st century, the mass media have been rated as one of the most influential agents of socialization (Thomas 1995, 113). One tool of the CED is a department that publishes all materials needed for the church. In addition to the publishing department, the CITAM Broadcasting Service (CBS), CITAM Online, Hope Radio, and Hope TV are also available for content creation and dissemination. CITAM Valley Road members do not miss out on Bible study materials, which are produced in-house. A research department works on any content needed to make the Bible study materials.

Research Methodology

CITAM Valley Road is considered the mother of all the over 40 assemblies across the country and outside Kenya (Mwangi and Mugambi 2024, 616). The sanctuary is approximately 2.5 km from the Nairobi Central Business District and spans a land area of about 3 acres. The site has various buildings, but the main building is the sanctuary, which can accommodate 4000

people (Mugambi 2009, 103). The other main building is the Jubilee Ministry Centre (JMC), which has four floors. Another building houses Tulivu, a café that serves both Citamites and non-Citamites 7 days a week from 7:00 am to 8:00 pm. There is also the caretaker's house and a parking area within the compound. However, parking is insufficient for the considerable gatherings on Sundays and during high-profile events. For this reason, additional parking has been sought a few metres away from the sanctuary. The two parkings are still insufficient, and the roads outside the sanctuary are used as overflow parking areas. The location is ideal for members and families who use public or private transport to the place of worship. The membership catchment area is about a 50 km radius. Researching this congregation requires being observant and having access to the community for an extended period.

To become a keen observer, I immersed myself in the life of this dynamic community. I collected qualitative data using an ethnographic research design, which involved focused group discussions, participant observation, and interviews (Cohen et al. 2007, 404). Ethnographic research design helps provide a deep understanding of cultures and contexts, capturing real-life experiences in their authentic context. For three years, from 2020, I attended the majority of the Sunday services and became a member of two neighbourhood churches (Safari Groups) and participated in the Tuesday evening prayer meetings; I also participated in Men Fellowship meetings every third Friday of the month and attended two Annual General Meetings, among other annual events. While researching, I also attended two weddings and two burial services. Most of the qualitative data was obtained from these meetings. At the start of the research, most of it was conducted virtually because of the COVID-19 lockdown. I also attended two extensive activities. The first was the Leadership Advancement Pathway (LAP), which occurred twice weekly for three months. The second was the Consistent Bible Reading (CBR) Cohort 4, which took place once every month for eight months. The CBR class was divided into groups of seven to ten members, which helped strengthen accountability in reading the Bible on a daily basis. The CBR training is meant to help Christians develop consistency and discipline to make Bible reading a lifelong habit (Gitonga 2008, 5).

Apart from Safari Group meetings, most weekly activities were broadcast live on YouTube, Facebook, CITAM Online, and occasionally on Hope TV and the CITAM Broadcasting Service. This allowed me to replay various activities for clarity and understanding. Sometimes, I used my camera to take still pictures of essential activities and events and recorded some videos to refer to later. I had a phone notebook that I used on many occasions. The Tulivu Café was ideal for conducting interviews and focus group discussions for research purposes. Meeting in homes for the Safari Group was also suitable for observing members away from the sanctuary. By immersing myself in the community, I soaked up as much information and collected the data that I needed (Bhattacharjee 2012, 40). The data collected was from field notes, pictures, videos, and interviews. In one online Safari Group Meeting, I participated as the leader for the prayers that week. The host ensured that a scripture reading backed every prayer item.

The massive amount of data obtained is a microcosm of the life of an urban Pentecostal church, which continues to attract new members whenever a new assembly is opened. The other qualitative data sources are over ten CITAM Bible Study Guides and membership class materials. For this article, the central theme is how the Bible has been at the centre of the life of CITAM Valley Road, what that means to CITAM members, and the lessons for other Christians. The data comes from the advantages of the ethnographic approach, which are its sensitivity to the context, the rich and nuanced understanding it generates, and minimal respondent bias (Bhattacharjee 2012, 41).

One challenge of ethnographic research is going native (Cohen et al. 2007, 404). Going native implies that the researcher becomes an insider and may, therefore, lose objectivity in

observing and evaluating the community in which one has become an insider. To mitigate this shortcoming, I sometimes failed to attend some meetings and, in the meantime, attended my local church events and activities. I was also on a research team, where we met once a fortnight to review our progress and findings. I also attended two research conferences on ethnographic research and grounded theory.

The other challenge of ethnographic research is that it is an extremely time- and resource-intensive approach, and findings are specific to a given culture and less generalizable to different cultures (Bhattacharjee 2012, 41). The current research was part of a wider research project funded by the Nagel Institute of Calvin University. The funding catered for the time and resources that I required for this ethnographic research.

Findings and Discussions

The research on how the Bible has been used at CITAM Valley, both at the individual and corporate levels, yielded qualitative data from various research tools. Through coding, the data from each research tool revealed various patterns and themes concerning the Bible being used as a social organizational tool at CITAM Valley Road.

The Bible's influence and significance as an organizational tool are evident in the name, operations, and functions of CITAM Valley Road. For instance, the statement of faith underlines the belief in the divine inspiration, truthfulness, and authority of the sixty-six (66) books of the Old and New Testament Scriptures as the infallible word of God with the power to accomplish God's purpose of salvation (CITAM 2019, 5). The response to the CITAM CED advertisement for the Consistency Bible Reading indicates positive regard for the scriptures by the CITAM members (CBR) for cohort 4 (Mwangi 2023). During the program, the CED leadership would organize monthly meetings on the second Sunday of the month in the afternoon, both in person and online, to have training sessions on the significance of CBR for every Christian. Over 400 CITAM members completed the program, indicating the positive reception that CBR has received. During the training meetings, the main guiding verse to be memorized was Joshua 1:8, among others: 'This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth; you shall meditate on it day and night so that you may be careful to act by everything written in it. For then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall be successful.' The need to read the scriptures is not without a historical context. The training sessions would demonstrate that the Book of the Law was to be read and used for meditations by leaders and at home by parents with their children. As for leaders, Joshua 1:8 was made a memory verse, while Deuteronomy 6:6-9 was used for the family setup. The reference to the Old Testament agrees with the argument that, historically, the covenant in the Old Testament served and still serves as an organizational tool for Judaism and now for Christianity (Parker 2003, 627).

The CBR presents the Bible as God's will and instruction for spiritual progress, prosperity, and success in this life. The response to each CBR call demonstrates that the CITAM members accept it as a significant tool in the believer's life. For instance, whenever the issue of CBR would pop up, the members in the Safari Groups that the researcher attended would be heard saying, 'I am in [...] in the Old Testament or New Testament, and I desire to finish with my cohort'. Or 'I have not started yet, but in the next cohort, I will propose to join CBR.' And others would say, 'Through the CBR, for the first time, I have learned how to pray scripture.' At the end of the membership class, new believers and new members of CITAM sign the four covenants (CITAM 2022c, 28). The covenant is a central theme in the Old Testament, representing a sacred agreement between God and the Jewish people. The four CITAM covenants entail membership, maturity, ministry, and mission. Evangelicals present the New Testament as a fulfillment of the Old Testament. The promises in the Old

Testament are also meant for Christians. In the Bible, God asks certain things of the people, promising them special care in return. The covenant is the foundation for the idea of the Jews as the chosen people. CITAM, as a Pentecostal church, believes the Old Testament points to the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. In the New Testament, Jesus Christ founded the new community—the people of God, also known as the Church. A new member gains a new identity in Christ and becomes responsible for personal growth and the community of believers (CITAM). The truths of biblical interpretation and application are expected to be covenantal, Christocentric, redemptive, and oriented toward holiness (Parker 2003, 630). Many Safari Groups and Men's Fellowship respondents expressed their appreciation for how the Bible is used at CITAM Valley Road and how it unites them as children of God.

One of CITAM Valley Road's core values is a community that upholds the family, values partnership, is committed to reaching the disadvantaged, and embraces unity (2022, 5). In the Old Testament, the covenant outlines promises (blessings, land, protection) and obligations (following God's commandments, circumcision) (Lillback 2003, 173). The promises and commitments of God's people settle the individual's and the community's identity. It establishes a unique relationship between God and the Jewish people and provides a framework for laws, rituals, and observances (Lillback 2003, 174). The covenant also guides communal life, worship, and ethical behaviour. The four CITAM covenants create a sense of community—a shared destiny and purpose. In the Old Testament, the Jews' commitment to God bound them together with one another and with God. The covenant established the Jewish identity. The New Testament identifies the believers in Jesus Christ as a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and God's people (1 Peter 2:9). The Bible creates and sustains a new kind of people in the Old Testament and the New Testament. The same principle is applied at CITAM Valley Road.

CITAM Valley Road has a centralized leadership structure, with the presiding bishop as the national and international leader. At the assembly level, the leader is the senior pastor, assisted by other pastors. The members of CITAM Valley are distributed within Nairobi city and its environs, with the region divided into five central sections with neighbourhood churches or Safari Groups (Christ is The Answer Ministries (CITAM Valley Road n.d., 6). Leadership is crucial to fulfilling and upholding covenants. In the Old Testament, three key leaders emerge within this covenantal context: prophets, priests, and kings. In the New Testament, the operative words are 'grace' and 'faith' in forming the body of Christ, also known as the people of God, and the priesthood of all believers. The offices and institutions mentioned in the Old Testament are not found in the New Testament or in the early church. However, in later developments, different leadership structures emerged to care for the people of God. For spiritual growth and church administration, CITAM Valley Road has trained pastors. Most CITAM pastors are trained at Pan African Christian University, a Christian university sponsored by CITAM.

The senior pastor leads the church, assisted by the deputy senior pastor. Together, they are assisted by the CED pastor, the youth pastor, the visitation pastor, the counselling pastor, and the Sunday School pastor, who collectively form the seven pastors. The pastors are assisted by ministry coordinators, who are elected every two years. The ministry coordinators are supervisors of the different ministries at CITAM Valley Road. As noted earlier, over 30 ministries have their committee members elected every two years. The leaders of all the ministries, along with the coordinators, are referred to as ministry workers. The Leadership Advancement Pathway (LAP) prepares and equips ministry workers who may not have had formal theological training to lead effectively, using the Bible as their guiding framework. To oversee the ministry, the Deacon Board and the Council of Elders are answerable to the Regional Annual Delegates Conference and the National Annual Delegates Conference (CITAM 2024a). The Bible is the primary text for each leader and group of leaders, informing

their faith and practice in the Christian life. In one focus group discussion, the response as to why they joined CITAM was echoed by one member, saying with the agreement of the others that, ‘I like the way CITAM pastors use the Bible in their preaching without using the scriptures to take advantage of the members.’

The place of the Bible within the life of CITAM Valley Road is evident. The pastors use the Bible as they preach from the pulpit every Sunday and in other gatherings of the members. The pulpit ministry is, therefore, very central to the life of Citamites (sic). At its best, the pulpit ministry nurtures communities that are passionately patient and courageously committed to witnessing and working in the kingdom of God, no matter how long it takes or how much it costs (Peterson 1993, 47). Interactions with Safari Group members reveal how the Bible is presented from the pulpit and how it holds a special place in people’s lives. Members consistently express their joy in joining CITAM Valley Road. Some even remember how, in former denominations, they would only be treated to drama on Sundays, when the Bible was misrepresented and the individual pastor became the centre of the sermon.

During the research, it was observed that the Bible is used in all special occasions, such as the baptism of new believers, children’s dedications, weddings, Holy Communion, and burial ceremonies.² Nevertheless, these practices, referred to as church ordinances, demonstrate commitment to God and the community of believers. At each significant transition in life, the church is present for the individual, and the individual is present for the community. For instance, during children’s dedication, parents are reminded to teach their children the word of God until they can make an informed choice to be part of the community of faith that uses the Bible as its organizing framework. New believers and new members at CITAM Valley Road are also expected to read the New Testament within one month, and they promise to cultivate a daily habit of reading the Bible.

One significant activity that opens CITAM Valley Road Ministries to non-Citamites is the ministry to children, teens, and youth. Activities such as teen and youth camps, as well as Devotional Vocational Bible Study for Sunday school children during school holidays, are major attractions. Another event for the children’s ministry is the celebration of the African Children’s Day of Prayer. Through these various activities, children are socialized to become friends of Jesus through the study of the Bible from a child’s perspective and response. They are taught how to memorize as many scriptures as possible for their growth in Christ. Notably, one characteristic of the Bible is its continuity and adaptability, as the covenant provides a thread of continuity across generations (Lillback 2003). It adapts to changing circumstances while preserving core principles. The church is crucial for developing character and strengthening values, and we cannot do without it (Mugambi 1995, 139). Many references in the Bible illustrate the responsibility that parents and the people of God bear in guiding children to be partakers of the covenant. Chief among these are Deuteronomy 6:4-9 and Proverbs 22:6, which emphasize that the socialization of children into the life of the covenant is a continuous process and an obligation. The various activities for children, teens, and youth are grounded in the Bible to reinforce the covenant bond.

The Safari Groups, or small Christian communities, played a vital role at CITAM Valley Road during the COVID-19 pandemic. Members gathered online for Bible study, fellowship, and to assist those in need. The Bible study materials are readily available, as CITAM has a publishing department. This department works closely with a research team to provide various church groups with contextual Bible study and discipleship materials (CITAM Christian Education Department 2022). At CITAM Valley Road, individual identity and responsibilities are realized through the small Christian communities. As Christians, the

² The researcher was a participant observer and, therefore, participated in various activities and programs of CITAM Valley Road during the research period.

identity of the chosen people entails bearing responsibility. Citamites are, therefore, called to live ethically, seek justice, and repair the world. This means that from the main sanctuary, a member is challenged to be the light and salt of the earth, or what has now been termed market evangelism (CITAM 2022a). At the Safari Group level, the aspect of accountability pertains to identity and individual responsibility.

The name ‘safari’ (journey) is very instructive in the life of CITAM Valley Road (CITAM 2020, i). The understanding is that Christians are a community on a journey. This is an appropriate metaphor for all the people of God since they are journeying with God, as put in Hebrews 11–12 (Niringiye 2014, 175). As a pilgrim community, the Bible serves as a companion to both the larger community and the individual. The individual is admonished to train to be godly (1 Tim 4:7) and, therefore, take responsibility for individual growth, pilgrimage, or safari (journey). For instance, for the disciples to be like Jesus Christ, they would stay with him full-time (Gitonga n.d., 10). For CITAM Valley Road, groups of individuals using the Bible as a companion in their Christian life are called Safari Groups. Every member is, therefore, expected to be part of a Safari Group, and the purpose of the Safari Groups is Bible study, fellowship, prayer, and support for one another (CITAM 2022b, 43). The Bible unites believers and fosters unity as part of the broader pilgrim community.

Regarding the wider audience, CITAM Valley Road’s primary target is English-speaking individuals in Nairobi. However, Nairobi is a notably complex and cosmopolitan city, characterized by a multitude of contrasts. Nairobi is a place that attracts and fascinates (Adolwa 2010, 9). There are attractions and fascinations not only in the physical world but also in religious life. Many religions found in rural areas are also present in the city, and other religions, including those outside Kenya and Africa, have a following in Nairobi. From a Christian perspective, there are religious communities that are seen as cults and sects that require a Christian response (CITAM 2024b). The research findings indicate that the mutual need for survival and productivity enjoins the reading and the interpretation of the Bible, which may be akin to social control. The control is to have believers maintain their faith and avoid cults and the occult that seem to carry away people who are not well-grounded in the knowledge and understanding of the Bible. As a sacred text, the Bible has significantly shaped societies, norms, and behaviours. Throughout history, religious texts—the Bible—have been used to maintain order, enforce standards, and regulate community behaviour (Thomas 1995, 362). Through the Bible study guides, CITAM’s leadership influences individuals and groups by interpreting and disseminating specific passages for intentional discipleship.

Conclusion

The study notes that CITAM Valley Road is a product of the Bible and uses Scripture for identity as well as a tool for social organization and operations. The focus is derived from the covenant in the Old Testament, which served as an organizational tool for Judaism, shaping its beliefs, practices, and communal life. It bound Jews together across time and space, emphasizing their unique relationship with God. During one of the membership classes that the researcher attended, the facilitator informed the would-be members that the CED at CITAM Valley Road focuses on intentional discipleship as a means of socializing CITAM Valley Road members to be a community founded on the Bible and seeking to practice God’s Word regarding human life. This is why the motto ‘Christ is the Answer’ provides solace for all human questions at all times (CITAM 2019, 5).

The focus and activities of CITAM, a Pentecostal church with branches across major urban centres in Kenya, demonstrate that the Bible resonates with individuals in urban areas who aspire to ‘survive’ and be productive in the city (Ese and Ese 2020). It fosters a sense of

stability and an alternative family structure where individuals feel welcome to survive and thrive in competitive urban settings. Observing and studying small Christian groups and ministry teams reveals that they serve as alternative nuclear families, where belonging and care are nurtured and encouraged through the Bible. Many times, in Safari Groups, the researcher observed the leader, especially when there was a welfare issue, reminding members that ‘this is Faith’s or Tom’s (not the actual names) family; let us help her or him as we have done to others.’

CITAM demonstrates that urban Pentecostalism (Mwangi and Mugambi 2024) elevates the Bible to new heights as a document whose oldest parts have endured for nearly three thousand years as a means of social control and engineering. Pentecostalism does not shy away from being a strategic partner with the government of the day or from pursuing political power with members sympathetic to the movement (Mwangi and Mugambi 2024, 617). The survival instinct, taking centre stage, pushes individuals to learn how to survive with minimal effort. Once their basic livelihood is secured, they can strive for greater productivity. Without humility, this survival urge can be, and has been, exploited with dire consequences for unsuspecting masses. The narratives in the Bible serve as powerful tools in shaping relations that ensure the survival and flourishing of both individuals and the community.

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